



# MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

**Meeting Date:** April 23, 2020

**Agenda Item:** Blackleaf Wildlife Management Area – Grazing Lease Renewal, Region 4

**Action Needed:** Final Approval

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 Minutes

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## **Background:**

The Blackleaf Wildlife Management Area (BLWMA) encompasses more than 11,000 acres located approximately 12 miles west of Bynum along the Rocky Mountain Front in Teton County. The affected area of the proposed action is gentle and rolling topography, primarily limber pine and grassland savannah with scattered Douglas fir. Since 2002, this 4-pasture grazing rotation (one pasture is grazed and three are rested each year) has successfully maintained the vigor, palatability, attractiveness, and structural diversity of vegetation for the benefit of wildlife. The proposed action is to renew the grazing lease for 4 years with the Pollock Ranch. Year-round and seasonal forage for elk, moose, mule and white-tailed deer, antelope and other nongame species would be maintained. Public hunting access on the lessee's property would also be incorporated within the grazing lease.

## **Public Involvement Process & Results:**

The Environmental Assessment for the project was available for public review from February 14 to March 14, 2020, receiving three (3) comments. One (1) comment expressed support while two (2) comments did not state a position. FWP released a decision notice in support of the grazing lease on March 18, 2020.

## **Alternatives and Analysis:**

Under the no-action alternative, a decline in abundance and quality of forage on the BLWMA would be expected over the long term. Residual and less vigorous vegetation would accumulate. The area would become less attractive to deer, elk and other big game species, likely increasing use of adjacent private lands by deer and elk (particularly during spring green-up). Under the proposed action, the productive condition of vegetation would continue, providing quality forage for big game and nongame species, thereby potentially reducing deer and elk use of adjacent private lands. In addition, strong relations with area landowners would continue as well as public hunting opportunity on the lessee's property.

## **Agency Recommendation & Rationale:**

The Department recommends approving the grazing lease renewal as proposed. For almost 20 years, the lease has maintained attractive vegetation for wildlife on the BLWMA.

## **Proposed Motion:**

I move that the commission approve the Blackleaf WMA grazing lease renewal with the Pollock Ranch as proposed.